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Cuffs

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By TAYSHA MURTAUGH Photography YUE WU

Being tied up is a very powerful sensation for Alexandra Goldina, or “Sasha,” as she is more commonly known. She loves the feeling of rope. She loves the way it digs deep into her skin. When she’s untied, she loves the marks the ropes leave behind, a fading shadow of the thrilling experience. She feels beautiful while tied up and suspended.

The sophomore in advertising is one of the most courageous people you’ll ever meet. If her blue hair, dark lips and edgy, gothic-meets-pin-up inspired style don’t make her stand out on campus, her position as president of Cuffs certainly does.

Cuffs is the first and longest-running student organization devoted to alternate sexuality and lifestyles — such as BDSM, or Bondage and Discipline; Domination and Submission; and Sadomasochism, —in the nation, and it just so happens to be located right here on the Iowa State campus.

While combing through the maze of the MU Student Offices on the day of our interview, I ask a girl from another club if she knows where the Cuffs cubicle is located. She quickly shakes her head and says, “I have no idea.” Do I detect a hint of judgment?

Sasha and the rest of the, say, 25 club members are used to this kind of reaction. Every year at ClubFest, freshmen walking by the Cuffs booth gasp, gawk and gape at the graphic images taped up on posterboard depicting people bound in chains and rope. Most people quicken their pace, dart around and do what they can to avoid the “scary sex club.”

But the members of Cuffs aren’t bitter. They know their club and BDSM is not for everyone, and that’s perfectly fine with them.

“Some people are still going to be afraid because they’re afraid of sex,” says a post-doctoral student member who prefers to be referred to by her scene name, Dybbuk. “But the kind of conversation that’s going on here is demystifying.”

In our interview, Sasha seemed grateful that our college allowed a club of its kind, because many colleges don’t. She stressed that the purpose of the club is to promote safety and consent, squash stereotypes and bond (pardon the pun) with students that have similar interests. And although BDSM, kink and fetish play are often used sexually, Sasha says some people may simply enjoy the feeling of being tied up or a limited amount of pain without it leading into anything else.

“I think the most important thing for people to understand is that we’re not a sex

club. We don’t just meet to talk about what we’re going to do to each other.”

But they do talk about it. Bondage and fetishes, I mean. Every meeting, a group member or guest presenter leads a discussion on a particular form of play.

“To write a list of all the things that people are into would be absolutely impossible,” Sasha says, “because as soon as you think you’re done, there is something else.”

Rope play and suspension at one meeting sound sugary when compared to fire play, electro play or needle play at another.

And then there are fetishes. Some popular fetishes include latex, rubber and leather or forced cross-dressing.

Sometimes Cuffs just meets for socials or games, like “Kinky Crafts,” or “Kinky Pictionary,” which you have to admit sounds like a whole lot of fun. It’s not surprising that the session on rope play is the most popular; Sasha said last year they had about 60 people in attendance.

Although she said there will always be a new

fetish or type of play that she finds shocking, Sasha sticks by the Cuffs mantra: Nobody’s kink is bad. Nobody’s kink is wrong.

At the “No Rope Bondage” meeting, William Spencer, a former Cuffs president and ISU alumnus passes around belts, ties and scarves, calling the ties his “first bondage toy.”

Later, cuffs, blindfolds and homemade bondage toys make a lap around the room. Spencer starts demonstrating bondage on some volunteers. The club is very cautious about what forms of BDSM it can and cannot demonstrate in a meeting, and the members are not violent with each other.

Spencer binds plastic wrap and duct tape, another alternative to rope, around the trunk of a volunteer. He hooks the handcuffs of another volunteer to both ends of a spreader bar behind her back, leaving her breasts vulnerable. Anything of quality that is designed for BDSM use is going to cost a fair amount of money, some seasoned members say, so these are some easy and cheap ideas.

To lessen the cost of an interest in BDSM, Cuffs has a small library of books and equipment for people to check out and use.

“All the things I’m showing you are concepts,” reminds Spencer. “These are just tools and toys. Your best tool is between your ears: your imagination.”

Sasha says Cuffs provides an outlet for creative expression and discussion. Despite the misconception that BDSM is dark and extreme, Sasha smiles when she thinks of the meetings. “It’s really just fun, open, light.”

Through the club, she says she’s made a lot of friends because they tend to be open-minded people.

“It takes a certain level of courage to go to a club like [this], considering that in some societies it’s taboo.”

Cuffs welcomes anyone to attend any meeting and leave at any time. Just remember: nobody’s kink is wrong.

Do's and Don't's of BDSM

“It only takes once to fuck up and fuck up big.”
- William Spencer



Do

Establish constant consent

Set limits and communicate

Have a safe word that means stop (Cuffs recommends a monosyllabic word other than “no” or “stop” so those can still be used recreationally)

Get plenty of fluids and have potty breaks

Keep a flashlight and EMT safety scissors handy in case there’s a blackout

Don't

Participate with people you don’t know well or fully trust

Cut off circulation (try not to bind anywhere you can feel a pulse and watch for discoloration)

Leave a bound partner alone

Buy cheaply made toys and restraints that can damage skin (buy thick leather cuffs instead of thin metal cuffs)